

Meet Our Partners – USA – Dr. Shaza Khan



1. How did people in the USA respond to the research and data collection?

Islamic school leaders were excited to learn that there was research being done internationally, as well as nationally, to learn more about students' social emotional learning and how the Islamic school context may be impacting their development. They were eager to learn more about their own students' sense of belonging, forgiveness, empathy, and other constructs measured through this research. Even students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to reflect on the thought-provoking scenarios and questions embedded in the

survey, such as questions that prompted them to consider how they would respond differently in situations with Muslim and non-Muslim peers.

2. Are there any success stories or challenges you can share about conducting this type of survey?

Being able to collect reliable data about Islamic schools is a huge success in and of itself. A vast number of Islamic schools in the United States have been established for 20+ years now. To be able to collect and use data to gauge their impact on students and to identify areas of weakness or growth is important for their ongoing improvement.

An undeniable challenge occurred with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We still had eight more schools lined up to which we were going to visit and administer surveys, but we were unable to follow through due to the health and safety protocols the schools had to immediately establish. Furthermore, schooling is so structured and there is little 'free time' to be able to come in and administer surveys. Finally, simply getting in touch with Islamic school leaders to obtain proper permission to administer the survey was an added challenge. Islamic school leaders have so many things on their plate, that simply making that first point of contact can sometimes be the biggest hurdle in administering a large-scale survey of this type.

3. What are some of the implications of this research for your community in USA?

This survey allows Islamic schools in the United States to be able to benchmark and compare the ways in which their students are developing against Muslim students around the world. The survey also provides a launchpad for further studies with students in Islamic schools to investigate more deeply the trends that this research has identified. For example, the Islamic Schools League of America used the survey to help build a qualitative study with alumni of Islamic schools to better understand the ways in which their Islamic school experience impacted their sense of belonging, Muslim identity and sense of purpose in life.

***Dr. Shaza Khan** is the Executive Director of the Islamic Schools League of America, a nonprofit that supports full-time Islamic schools in the United States by providing professional development, networking, information, and resources, and engaging in critical research on Islamic education. Dr. Khan received her Ph.D. in Teaching, Curriculum and Change from the Warner School of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester (NY), where she studied the adolescent development and identity formation of Muslim American youth, focusing on second generation Americans. In her capacity as Executive Director, she has led numerous research efforts projects about full-time Islamic schools which assist school administrators in making data-informed decisions. She has co-authored peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters in an effort to disseminate findings which communicate the values and needs of full-time Islamic schools to the broader public.*